



FISHERIES COMMITTEE YEAR END REPORT

2016 started out with an early Halibut opening for the recreational Angler. February 1st saw the opening of halibut still under the regulations from last year. That's to say that if you had room left on your license left over from last season you could still catch halibut until you reached 6 on your license. The new season starts on April the 1st, the same day as all of your new licenses become valid and you have a brand new yearly limit of 6 fish. Our recreational catch quota sits right at about 1.1 million pounds.

Our Canadian contingent attended the annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, which was held in Juneau, Alaska this year. I was representing the BCWF, and as usual, the Canadian team represented us well. When all was said and done, the recreational angler should see about 45,000 pounds in quota over what we had last year. We are still adjusting our Recreational catch as we move into counting the "iRec" (Internet Recreational catch) survey results.

In spite of the lower numbers of halibut caught, the catch in pounds was still respectable. That's due to the fact that in BC we have fish that are heavy for their length. Expect to see a number of 133 cm fish weigh in excess of 80 pounds.

Catch limits for Halibut will continue to be one a day and two in possession. The upper size limit stays at 133 cm however the size limit for the lower end is going to be reduced back to the previous limit of 83 cm.

The concern over Yelloweye Rockfish will have a big factor in how we fish for both Lingcod and Halibut this year. I've been led to believe that if and when the commercial sector reaches their quota of Yelloweye Rockfish, the commercial halibut sector will be off the water whether or not they've reached their quota. The recreational sector is looking at a 33% reduction in Yelloweye Rockfish this year and once that's reached its unsure as to how our Halibut and Lingcod fishery will be affected. If you're not going to target Yelloweye Rockfish, then it's best to fish in an area where you know that they're not abundant.

At present, the Yelloweye catch is 287 metric tons a year. This needs to be reduced to 100 metric tons in 3 years. To assist in this, the recreational harvest has been reduced. West Coast Vancouver Island will see a reduction from 3 Rockfish a day, 2 being Yelloweye, to 3 a day with only one being a Yelloweye. North Coast goes from 5 rockfish a day with 3 being Yelloweye to 5 rockfish a day with only 2 being Yelloweye.

Lingcod continues to do quite well. The limit on the west coast of Vancouver Island in most places, if not all, is a generous three fish a day. East coast Vancouver Island has a limit of one fish a day with a further limit of ten fish a year.

If you're an avid Coho angler then the news is not good for this year. We've been told not to expect good Coho fishing this year. Sorry but that's the way it is. Washington State is taking this seriously. State, Tribal and Federal fishery managers have developed three plans to deal with this problem of which one plan would close all recreational and commercial ocean fishing for Chinook and Coho Salmon. <http://wdfw.wa.gov/news/mar1416a/>



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Chinook are expected to be much the same as last year. West Coast Vancouver Island returns are expected to be a little bit better than last year's. It's expected that Robertson Creek returns should exceed last year's return which is good news given their relatively poor returns the last few years.

Pinks were a real disappointment last year as well. The beach fishery that so many look forward to never really happened. Fish were caught out from the shore but never showed up along the beach. From the middle of August and onward Departure Bay in Nanaimo was checked at high tide hoping to see some sign of swirling or jumping pinks but they did not come. This was a common occurrence all the way down the inside of Vancouver Island. The thought is that with the extreme patches of bloom that we saw this past year the pinks may not have survived.

Sockeye success in the Sproat/Somass system depends on a number of factors. Of course the number of returning fish is of utmost importance. The snow pack is building as I write this report (March 11th), 470cm of snow on Mt Washington and that relates to lots of snow up on the ridges above the Alberni Canal. Lots of snow means lots of summer runoff and that isn't good news for the Sockeye angler. Fresh water in the canal means the fish don't stop and pool up which is what the anglers need to see to be successful. Rather, the fish head straight on up the river without biting. Time will tell this year. Last year, with the dry conditions, the sockeye pooled up well into August, a full month past when you normally fish for them. You could actually fish for Sockeye, Chinook and Coho Salmon at the same time and be successful on all three species. The 2016 expectation is a return of between 700,000 and 1,000,000 fish. Of course, last year's numbers started out at 700,000 found and ended up at 2.1 million. Expect to see a May 1st opening at full limits.

Fraser Sockeye numbers are not out yet however the general consensus is not encouraging. Prawning is and probably will continue to be the same old story. Over the winter we saw a lot of area closures. These closures will open back up on April 1st so I'll be unable to report on angler success in these areas. Other areas saw the implementation of pulse fishing. Two weeks open followed by two weeks closed. Although inconvenient, this still allows a limited fishery to take place. The closures resulted in heavy fishing in the few areas that remained open yet there was still pretty good success for those who know where to fish and how to properly lay out a string of traps.

The bottom line is that there have been prawns to catch but the days of just throwing your traps over the side and bringing up a good haul seems to be behind us. You have to work for your prawns but then that's fishing, isn't it?

Crabs haven't changed a whole lot either. Lots of crabs fill up your traps but when you pull them it is tough to find a legal male. Add that to the 18 more licenses to fish for crabs commercially in Georgia Strait and things aren't likely to improve a whole lot in the near future.

There was a proposal put forward by the Nanaimo Sport Fishing Advisory Committee to have a recreational only area for crabs created in the French Creek area. The proposal calls for an area defined by a two mile arc from the harbour entrance to be designated recreational fishing only. This proposal was approved at the South Coast SFAB meeting in Nanaimo last fall and was forwarded to the main board for approval. It had since gone to the Crab Working Group for



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consideration. Consideration is also being given to a size differential between commercially and recreationally caught crabs. There are a lot of items to consider here, i.e. the effect on the commercial sector and also whether or not a measure like this would actually increase the catch for the recreational crabber.

This has been a great deal of good work done all over the province this year. From the Kootenay Lake Rainbow and Bull Trout collapse meetings to the possible introduction of Sockeye to Okanagan Lake in the eastern side of the province. Concerns and even a SARA listing request for Thompson Steelhead in region three have kept many of us busy.

The SFAB steelhead committee started out wanting to look at stock abundance in the Skeena region but has turned to the greater concern of the Thompson and Chilcotin stocks. The Skeena stocks are not forgotten, just a more pressing need has come before us.

Striking a balance so that there is still the possibility of a chum fishery as well as a First Nations fishery while protecting these stocks is a daunting task. We need to explore all options open to us. Ken Franzen from Prince Rupert has done exceptional work for us on this file. He is chairing the committee which is like herding cats.

We have two members attending the Washington and BC chapter of the American Fisheries Society. I should have a report by the Mainboard meeting.

Some of the other issues we have been or are working on are as follows:

- Elk Lake study by Golden Rods & Reels (average age 78)
- Shawnigan Lake toxic dump site where a small victory in the courts has helped us for now.

Maybe now the province will take a second look at watersheds before approvals are granted.

A new fish ladder is finally being built on the Salmon River, after years of work and requests by the Sayward Fish & Game Club. Thanks to these folks for having a good plan and following through.

A set of Prawn interviews and a meeting with an independent facilitator held on March 30th have given us a different understanding of some issues we need to approach DFO with. More to come on this fishery for sure as we continue to seek a balance for all three - First Nation, Recreational and Commercial.

Region Two has been very active in the Fishing Forever program and has constructed one dock on the ponds at the Fresh Water Fisheries Society's Fraser Valley Hatchery. They have removed weeds, Rob Ausma nearly swamped his boat but the job got done. Next is another dock! This is the type of project we take on and do.

I need to thank Al Martin for his patience and sound ideas for solutions.

Rick Simpson continues to be a workhorse in the Okanagan.



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Dave White and Don Trethewey advise me when I have not commented on an issue, and that is usually because I have not asked enough questions.

I would also like to thank the office staff for all they do for me over the year. I appreciate it.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Ted Brookman
Inland Fisheries Chair and Co-chair Tidal Fisheries